

# News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 7, 2003

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## Progress Shown for Snowy Plover

### **Coastal Commission Extends Permit For Oceano Dunes Off-Road Park**

SAN LUIS OBISPO – Citing State Parks' efforts in the "protection of sensitive coastal resources," the California Coastal Commission today allowed the operating permit to remain in effect for Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area, a popular off-road park on the Central Coast.

Oceano Dunes provides unmatched off-road opportunities for more than 1 million visitors a year, and at the same time earmarks about a third of its annual budget for the protection of wildlife and related habitats. The park is in San Luis Obispo County near Pismo Beach.

A Coastal Commission staff report presented at the meeting in San Luis Obispo noted that State Parks management measures being implemented at Oceano Dunes appear to be resulting in "the improved protection of sensitive coastal resources." Commissioners found that nesting western snowy plovers, a threatened species, have shown significant progress in chick survival following State Park's efforts at predator management.

A State Parks report shows that 35 of the 62 snowy plover chicks at Oceano Dunes fledged – survived to an age in which they were able to fly from the nest – for a chick fledging rate of 56 percent last year. That figure far surpasses the previous year's 4 percent fledge rate that was recorded before State Parks instituted its predator management efforts.

The federal government has listed the western snowy plover as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.

State Parks Acting Director Ruth Coleman presented to the commission a report on State Parks' overall efforts along the coast to protect and enhance populations of the western snowy plover. She noted that State Parks, which has jurisdiction over about a fourth of the 1,100-mile California coastline, now has special protection measures in place at about 30 state parks.

The Coastal Commission approved a Coastal Development Permit in 1982 for the construction of habitat fencing and entrance kiosks at Oceano Dunes SVRA. That permit and subsequent amendments established limits to the number of vehicles and campsites allowed, and required ongoing reviews to ensure that off-highway vehicle recreation is managed consistent with the protection of sensitive dune habitats. No formal action was required by the Commission at Friday's hearing to continue the permit.

The Commission approved a resolution Friday recommending that State Parks consider closing another one-half mile of the beach currently open to off-road vehicles. State Parks is already considering such a proposal as part of a legal settlement agreement. The Commission's scientific subcommittee that was established to study Oceano Dunes also recommended the half-mile closure.

In a report to Commission members, Oceano Dunes Superintendent Steve Yamaichi detailed a series of steps taken by the Department during the last year, including:

- Increasing illegal camping penalties from \$64 to \$270 and vigorously enforcing them during periods of high overnight use.
- Completing the first administrative draft Habitat Conservation Plan for Oceano Dunes and other San Luis Obispo Coast state park units, with the goal of managing the natural resources of the areas on a regional basis.
- Implementing a series of measures to protect the snowy plover along the California coastline under the jurisdiction of the Department.
- Carrying out an effective predator management plan at Oceano Dunes directly contributing to a snowy plover fledged rate of 56 percent at the park, one of the highest rates in the state.

The western snowy plover is a sparrow-sized, pale-colored shorebird that breeds along the Pacific Coast from southern Washington to southern Baja California, Mexico. The coastal population of the bird is listed by the federal government as threatened due to a serious decline in breeding numbers, mainly as a result of loss of suitable habitat and disturbance by people.

Efforts to protect the birds at Oceano Dunes have been ongoing for several years. Last summer, State Parks implemented a series of steps statewide to protect and enhance populations of western snowy plovers. These included restrictions on visitor use in areas that provide important plover habitat, particularly nesting areas. They also included enforcement of existing regulations prohibiting dogs on state beaches, and prohibition of dogs on certain beaches.

Snowy plovers nest on open, sandy beaches along much of the coastline from early spring to mid-fall. State Beaches provide essential nesting habitat for plovers, and at a time of the year that typically coincides with highest visitor use. Because of this, proper stewardship

and protection of nesting areas on State Beaches by California State Parks is vital to the recovery of the species.

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